



GREEN SPRING GARDENS PARK

PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

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RECOMMENDED HARDY ORNAMENTAL GRASSES, SEDGES, AND RUSHES FOR GARDENS IN THE WASHINGTON, D.C. AREA

Ornamental grasses, sedges, and rushes are an exciting addition to American gardens. These tough yet beautiful plants give gardens a more natural look and are valued for their fine texture and myriad variations of form, size, and color. Ornamental grasses are also valued for their graceful movement and the soothing sound that the rustling of their leaves and stems provides. They have a long season of interest, from fresh green tufts in the spring, to feathery flowers in summer and autumn, then soft brown and golden hues and welcome structure in the winter landscape. In addition, native grasses, sedges, and rushes provide invaluable food and cover to birds, butterflies, and other wildlife.

True grasses are a member of Poaceae, the grass family, but many plants that resemble grasses are actually sedges and rushes. Cyperaceae is the sedge family and Juncaceae is the rush family. The recommended plants are hardy herbaceous perennials (plants that form little or no woody tissue and live for three or more years).

The following are useful definitions:

- Cultivar (cv.) – a cultivated variety designated by single quotes (e.g., 'Overdam'). A **variety (var.)** or **subspecies (subsp.)**, in contrast, is found in nature and is a subdivision of a species.
- Full shade – the amount of light under a dense deciduous tree canopy or beneath evergreens.
- Naturalistic use – native plants that, when properly sited, perform well with minimal care; best used in an informal design that suggests a natural landscape. Most native species can be used this way, and this is the best way to use some species with informal growth habits or species that reseed readily.
- Part shade – the amount of light in an area shaded part of the day, among deciduous trees with high branches, among deciduous trees with foliage that is not heavy, or among thinned deciduous woods.

The following species are good garden plants for the Washington, D.C. area. Most of them form clumps rather than spreading by aboveground or underground stems as turf grasses do. The few spreading types that are listed spread slowly enough to be suitable for gardens. Recommended cultivars are listed in parentheses. Most ornamental grasses prefer full sun (6 hours or more of sunlight daily) and moist sites, although a few species are very drought tolerant or prefer some shade. Most of the sedges and rushes listed here prefer some shade and a moist site. Grasses, sedges, and rushes that need to grow in wet sites are not included. Light requirements are noted in the comments column, as well as special cultural requirements and tolerances. It is also noted if a plant is evergreen or semi-evergreen. Species that are native to Virginia are marked with an asterisk (*).

ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

Scientific Name	Common Name	Comments
<i>Andropogon virginicus</i> *	Broomsedge Bluestem, Beard Grass	Full sun in well-drained sites; very drought tolerant; best for naturalistic use
<i>Arundo donax</i> 'Variegata' (the species itself is invasive in some areas of VA - only grow the cv. in gardens of northern VA)	Striped Giant Reed	Full sun; marginally hardy in northern VA so may want to mulch heavily in late November; keep away from natural areas
<i>Calamagrostis</i> x <i>acutiflora</i> 'Karl Foerster' ('Stricta'); 'Overdam' is a variegated cv. that prefers light shade <i>C. brachytricha</i>	Feather Reed Grass Korean Feather Reed Grass	Full sun to light shade
<i>Chasmanthium latifolium</i> *	River Oats	Full sun to part shade; reseeds readily in moist sites (good for naturalistic use)
<i>Elymus hystrix</i> (<i>Hystrix patula</i>)*	Bottlebrush Grass	Light shade to part shade; tolerates dry sites; reseeds readily; best for naturalistic use due to informal look
<i>Eragrostis trichodes</i> ('Bend') Note: native <i>E. spectabilis</i> * is good for naturalistic use but needs excellent drainage (sandy or very dry soils)	Sand Love Grass	Full sun in well-drained sites
<i>Hakonechloa macra</i> 'Aureola' ('Albovariegata' is nice also)	Golden-variegated Hakone Grass	Light shade to part shade
<i>Miscanthus</i> 'Giganteus' (<i>M. floridulus</i>) <i>M. sinensis</i> cvs. w/ low seed viability (the species itself is invasive in natural areas of VA): 'Morning Light' & 'Strictus' (porcupine grass); lovely variegated cvs. that may have low seed viability in our area (not in recent scientific study): 'Cabaret' & 'Cosmopolitan'	Giant Miscanthus Variegated Miscanthus Cultivars	Full sun; seed is not viable; for screening use Full sun; most cvs. are very drought tolerant; keep away from natural areas
<i>Molinia caerulea</i> subsp. <i>arundinaceae</i> ('Skyracer', 'Transparent', 'Windspiel')	Purple Moor Grass	Full sun; moist to wet sites
<i>Muhlenbergia capillaris</i> * <i>M. lindheimeri</i>	Pink Muhly, Pink Hair Grass, Purple Muhly Lindheimer's Muhly	Full sun in well-drained sites; very drought tolerant See above; a Zone 7 plant – has been hardy at Green Spring

<i>Panicum virgatum</i> * (‘Dallas Blue’, ‘Heavy Metal’, ‘Rotstrahlbusch’, ‘Shenandoah’)	Switch Grass	Full sun; tolerant of wet soils; very drought tolerant
<i>Pennisetum alopecuroides</i> (‘Cassian’, ‘Hameln’) <i>P. orientale</i>	Hardy Fountain Grass Hardy Oriental Fountain Grass	Full sun; some cvs. reseed too readily (e.g., ‘Moudry’) Full sun
<i>Saccharum brevibarbe</i> var. <i>contortum</i> (<i>Erianthus contortus</i>)* <i>S. giganteum</i> (<i>Erianthus giganteus</i>)* <i>S. (Erianthus) ravennae</i>	Bent-awn Plume Grass Sugarcane Plume Grass, Giant Plume Grass Ravenna Grass	Full sun in moist sites for native species; bent-awn plume grass is best for naturalistic use This non-native likes full sun in drier sites to minimize flopping; very drought tolerant
<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i> * (‘The Blues’ is a lovely cv. but needs sandier, dry soils to minimize flopping)	Little Bluestem	Full sun; very drought tolerant
<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i> * ‘Sioux Blue’	Sioux Blue Indian Grass	Full sun; very drought tolerant; species best for naturalistic use; reseeds readily
<i>Sporobolus heterolepsis</i> *	Prairie Dropseed	Full sun; very drought tolerant

ORNAMENTAL SEDGES AND RUSHES

Scientific Name	Common Name	Comments
<i>Carex conica</i> ‘Marginata’ (also called ‘Variegata’ or ‘Snowline’) <i>C. dolichostachya</i> ‘Kaga Nishiki’ (Gold Fountains is the commercial trade name) <i>C. grayi</i> * Note: <i>C. shortiana</i> * is a beautiful native that grows in similar sites but prefers calcareous soils (likes lime or gypsum) <i>C. morrowii</i> ‘Goldband’, ‘Ice Dance’, ‘Variegata’, & var. <i>temnolepsis</i> ‘Silk Tassel’ <i>C. muskingumensis</i> ‘Wachtposten’ (‘Sentry Tower’)(species is native to KY, etc.)	Variegated Sedge Gold Fountains Sedge Gray's Sedge Morrow Sedge Cultivars Palm Sedge	Light shade to part shade; evergreen Light shade to part shade in consistently moist sites; naturalistic use Light shade to part shade; evergreen Full sun (moist to wet sites) to part shade; can be semi-evergreen; cv. is lower-growing than the species & better for gardens

<i>Carex oshimensis</i> 'Evergold'	Evergold Sedge	Full sun (moist sites) to part shade; evergreen
<i>C. pensylvanica</i> *	Pennsylvania Sedge	Full sun (moist sites) to part shade; semi-evergreen
<i>C. plantaginea</i> *	Plantainleaf Sedge	Light shade to full shade; tolerates dry sites in rich soil; semi-evergreen to evergreen
<i>C. siderosticha</i> 'Variegata' ('Island Brocade' has golden variegation)	Creeping Variegated Broad-leaved Sedge	Light shade to part shade
<i>Luzula nivea</i>	Snowy Woodrush	Light shade to part shade in moist to moderately dry sites; evergreen

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